

A Message from the State Board of Education and the State Superintendent of Public Instruction

Seventeen years ago the report titled *A Nation at Risk*, issued by the National Commission of Excellence in Education, brought squarely to our attention a “rising tide of mediocrity” in our schools and led to an era of education reform. The results of that effort have been somewhat uneven. The reform movement did stimulate important infrastructure improvements: instructional time was increased, high school diplomas came to signify the completion of minimum course requirements, and emphasis was placed on local planning efforts to improve the schools’ efficiency and effectiveness. However, a shortcoming of the movement up to this point has been the lack of focus on rigorous academic standards. The desire to improve student achievement guided the effort, but it lacked a comprehensive, specific vision of what students need to know and to be able to do.

With the adoption of content standards, California is going beyond reform. We are redefining the state’s role in public education. For the first time in the visual and performing arts, we are stating—explicitly—the content that students need to acquire at each grade level prekindergarten through grade eight. And for grades nine through twelve, standards are provided at the proficient and the advanced levels. These standards are rigorous. With student mastery of the content, visual and performing arts achievement in California schools will equal that in the best educational systems in other states and nations. The content is attainable by all students, given sufficient time, except for those few who have severe disabilities. We regard the standards as firm but not unyielding. They will be modified in future years to reflect new research and scholarship.

Standards describe what to teach, not how to teach it.

Standards-based education maintains California’s tradition of respect for local control of schools. To help students achieve at high levels, local school officials and teachers—with the full support and cooperation of families, businesses, and community partners—are encouraged to take these standards and design the specific curricular and instructional strategies that best deliver the content to their students.

Standards are an enduring commitment, not a passing fancy.

Every initiative in public education, especially one so bold as establishing high standards, has its skeptics. “Just wait a while and standards, too, will pass” is what they say. We intend to prove the skeptics wrong, and we intend to do that by completely aligning state efforts to these standards, including curriculum frameworks, instructional materials, professional development, preservice education, and partnership efforts. We will see a generation of educators who think of standards not as a *new layer* but as the *foundation* itself.

Visual and performing arts standards in dance, music, theatre, and the visual arts.

These standards are appropriate for the visual and performing arts and include the disciplines of dance, music, theatre, and the visual arts. Within these disciplines students experience artistic expression through traditional and newer media, such as cinematography, video, and computer-generated visual design. The strands for the standards include artistic perception, creative expression, historical and cultural context, aesthetic valuing, and connections, relations, and applications. The strands have been agreed on as defining the areas of study that lead to success in education and in any career, including careers in the expanding field of the arts, and to full participation in our society.

Standards are our commitment to excellence.

Seventeen years from now the adoption of standards will be viewed as the signal event that began a rising tide of excellence in our schools. No more will the critical question *What should my child be learning?* be met with uncertainty of knowledge, purpose, or resolve. These standards answer the question. They are comprehensive and specific. They represent our commitment to excellence.

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Introduction

Dance, music, theatre, and the visual arts have endured in all cultures throughout the ages as a universal basic language. The arts convey knowledge and meaning not learned through the study of other subjects. Study in and through the arts employs a form of thinking and a way of knowing based on human judgment, invention, and imagination. Arts education offers students the opportunity to envision, set goals, determine a method to reach a goal and try it out, figure out alternatives, evaluate, revise, solve problems, imagine, work collaboratively, and apply self-discipline. As they study and create in the arts, students use the potential of the human mind to its full and unique capacity. The visual and performing arts are a vital part of a well-rounded educational program for all students.

The *Visual and Performing Arts Content Standards for California Public Schools, Kindergarten Through Grade Twelve* (CDE Press, 1996) represents a strong consensus on the skills, knowledge, and abilities all students should be able to master in dance, music, theatre, and the visual arts at specific grade levels, prekindergarten through grade twelve, in California public schools.

The standards were built on the components of arts education contained in the *Visual and Performing Arts Framework for California Public Schools, Kindergarten Through Grade Twelve*, that was adopted by the State Board of Education in 1996. The strands and standards in this publication describe the content that students need to master by the end of each grade level

(prekindergarten through grade eight) or cluster of grades (grades nine through twelve at the proficient and advanced levels).

These standards were developed in response to Senate Bill 1390 (Murray), signed by Governor Gray Davis in September 2000. That bill calls for State Board of Education-adopted visual and performing arts content standards and states that visual and performing arts instruction should be available to all students. As with standards in other curriculum areas, however, the bill does not require schools to follow the content standards. Nothing in the bill mandates an assessment of pupils in the visual or performing arts. As stated in the bill, “The content standards are intended to provide a framework for programs that a school may offer in the instruction of visual or performing arts.”

Format of the Arts Standards

For each arts discipline content standards are defined under five visual and performing arts strands: artistic perception, creative expression, historical and cultural context, aesthetic valuing, and connections, relations, and applications. At each grade level, prekindergarten through grade eight, content standards are specified for each strand. For students in grades nine through twelve the proficient level of achievement can be attained at the end of one year of high school study within an arts discipline after the student has attained the level of achievement required of all students in grade eight. The

advanced level can be attained at the end of a second year of high school study within an arts discipline and subsequent to attaining the proficient level of achievement.

These standards are written to apply to all students. The standards at each grade level build on the knowledge and skills the student has gained the earlier grades. When reading the standards at a particular grade level, one must have an understanding of the standards at all the previous grade levels to see how expectations build on prior learning.

Upon examining the standards in any of the art forms at a given grade level, one sees overlaps and points of connection across the strands. The overlaps and connections are to be expected because the strands and the standards are intrinsically interrelated. For example, when working with a partner or small group in creating a dance sequence, the student is applying his or her skills and perceptions (Strand 1), is demonstrating proficiency in creative expression (Strand 2), and is reflecting on knowledge of the work of other dancers (Strand 3). In the same task the student is also participating in the critique process as he or she evaluates the dance sequence (Strand 4), is demonstrating skills in working with others, and is perhaps incorporating themes from other disciplines and reflecting on what a choreographer must know and be able to do (Strand 5).

Guiding Principles of the Arts Standards

Essential guiding principles for arts education programs are stated in the *Visual and Performing Arts Framework for California Public Schools, Kindergarten Through Grade Twelve* and are reflected throughout these standards. First, the arts are core subjects, each containing a distinct body of knowledge and skills. Academic rigor is a basic characteristic of a comprehensive

education in the arts, including the following:

- Active learning through the practice, rehearsal, and creation or performance of works in the arts
- Reading about the arts and artists
- Researching, writing, and communicating about the arts
- Reflecting on the arts in thoughtful essay or journal writing on one's observations, feelings, and ideas about the arts
- Participating in arts criticism based on observation, knowledge, and criteria

Another important goal of the standards is to help students make connections between concepts in all of the arts and across subject areas. The fifth strand in these standards requires the student to connect and apply what is learned in the arts to other art forms and subject areas and to careers.

The arts standards respect the multiplicity of cultures that are represented in California schools. They allow students to experience the arts from the perspectives of the American culture and of worldwide ethnic, racial, religious, and cultural groups.

Throughout the standards technology is recognized as an essential tool that enhances learning and expression in all the arts disciplines and provides for expanded forms of expression in digital and electronic media. New technologies for the arts, arts-related computer applications, and emerging arts-related careers are especially vital in California, where the demand for individuals with artistic skills and career orientations has been steadily growing in the vast arts and entertainment industry.

Delivery of a Standards-Based Arts Education Program

The standards identify what all students in California public schools should know

and be able to do at each grade level. Nevertheless, local flexibility is maintained with these standards. Topics may be introduced and taught at one or two grade levels before mastery is expected. Decisions about how best to teach the standards are left to teachers and to school district staff. Although the standards do not specify how the curriculum should be delivered, they do inspire the use of a variety of teaching strategies, both teacher-directed and student-centered. Various grouping strategies (individuals, pairs, small groups, and large groups) provide opportunities for all students to succeed. All students participate in dance, music, theatre, and the visual arts as performers and creators.

A comprehensive arts education program is composed of three modes of instruction:

1. Subject-centered arts instruction in dance, music, theatre, and the visual arts
2. Instruction connecting the arts disciplines
3. Instruction connecting the arts and other core subjects

Subject-centered arts instruction focuses on developing foundation skills in each arts discipline. Instruction connecting the arts disciplines ties each art form with one or more of the other arts disciplines in a well-planned, meaningful, focused way. Knowledge and skills of two or more arts disciplines are used in ways that are

mutually reinforcing and demonstrate the underlying unity of the arts. Instruction connecting the arts and other core subjects ties the arts to other subjects in substantive ways that strengthen the instructional goal in each subject.

A thoughtful curriculum design provides students with alternative ways to perceive and experience the world. A standards-based arts education program provides an avenue in which all students can work at a personalized pace, develop self-expression and self-confidence, and experience a sense of accomplishment.

Organization of This Document

This document is organized first by the four arts disciplines: dance, music, theatre, visual arts. The standards for each arts discipline are organized by grade level, beginning with prekindergarten and progressing through grade eight. The standards for grades nine through twelve are presented at the proficient and at the advanced levels. Students in those grades should take one year of a visual or performing art. In this course the student achieves a proficient level. Many students elect to take additional advanced-level arts courses in which they can achieve the advanced level. A glossary of key terms used in the standards are provided at the end of the standards for each of the arts.